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ABSTRACT

To gather input for the development of a two semester basic production course in radio, television, film, and media writing, a survey was sent to 278 college speech departments. Ninety departments responded. The first question dealt with the format for the course. The answers were so varied that the responses were combined into those that covered one, two, three, and four or more terms. One-term courses took many forms. The majority of the two-term courses took the form of one term of radio or audio and one term of television or video. Of the three-term sequences, most offered one term each of radio, television, and film. Responses to other questions showed that (1) most production courses incorporated as much or more lab instruction as lecture instruction, (2) on most campuses the low enrollment class is the norm, (3) 76% of the respondents incorporated no team teaching methods, (4) "Audio in Media" and "Television Production Handbook" were the clear radio and television text favorites, and (5) major projects included simple mix, 30-second spots, 2-minute news, commercials, silent image, visual essay, and interviews. These responses led to the development of a 2-semester, 10-hour sequence production course offered at Northern Illinois University for the first time in the fall of 1986. Each five credit course will incorporate five hours of lecture and six hours of lab weekly. (HOD)

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TEACHING PRODUCTION COURSES:
A SURVEY OF COURSE CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

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A paper presented at the
Speech Communication Association Convention
Denver, Colorado
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TEACHING PRODUCTION COURSES:
A SURVEY OF COURSE CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

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This paper grew out of a need in my department to economize on both student and faculty time in delivering basic production courses in radio, television, film and media writing. On our campus, the number of radio-television-film majors has grown while number of faculty has not. Consequently, we have graduating seniors who have just completed the basic sequence in production--which on our campus presently is a beginning course in radio, another in television, a third in film, as well as a media writing course. We were asked to transform this 12-hour, four-course sequence into something which could be handled in two semesters so that our graduates would all have an opportunity to take at least one advanced production course.

Only two articles which dealt with production courses were located as a result of an examination of the literature. One was an article which described the radio course as it was taught on our campus in 1983 (Novak). Another reported a survey of current practice as it was in 1972 (Martin).

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To gather current input, a survey was sent to the 278 departments listed in the BEA's 1981 survey. Ninety departments responded.

FORMAT OF INTRODUCTORY SEQUENCE

The first question dealt with the format for the basic production courses. "Which of the following most closely resembles the format of your basic production courses?"

a. 1 course--radio, television, film production
b. 2 courses--audio production; video production
c. 3 courses--radio, television, film production
d. other--please describe

The answers were so varied that responses were combined into those which covered 1 term (either semester or quarter), 2 terms, 3 terms, 4 or more. The results appear in table 1.

Table 1

Length of Introductory Sequence

1 term	2 terms	3 terms	4 or more
18%	34%	38%	11%

One-term courses take many forms. Some cover production in radio, television and film in one term.

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Others describe a one-term course which is an equipment orientation--often concluding with a proficiency test. Others focus on just one area--e.g., a one-term television course with a note that no course in radio or film existed,.

The majority of two-term courses take the form of a sequence of one term of radio or audio and one term of television or video. Seventy-nine percent of the two term sequences take this form. There are others which incorporate one term of television and one term of film. Another variation combines production with writing.

Of the three term sequences, 76% offered one term each of radio, television and film. Other variations included audio, video, slide-tape; radio, studio tv and ENG tv; and audio, video plus film or ENG.

Responses which included four or more courses appeared to include descriptions of many advanced courses.

METHOD OF INSTRUCTION

A second question dealt with the ratio of lecture time to laboratory instruction time. The results appear in Table 2.

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Table 2

Method of Instruction

All lecture, no lab	3%
3/4 lecture, 1/4 lab	7%
50/50	41%
1/4 lecture, 3/4 lab	48%
All lab, no lecture	1%

It is apparent that most production courses incorporate as much or more lab instruction as lecture instruction. For example, a course which meets for two hours a week for lecture instruction also, typically, meets for a six-hour lab.

Nearly as many respondents report a 50/50 ratio of lecture to lab. Our current practice at NIU reflects that ratio. For example, in the production courses, students meet for 2 hours of lecture and 2 hours of lab per week. Students have additional lab hours available to them to use on a voluntary basis,and most of them report using the production labs 1-2 hours or more per week. Given the practice in other departments, it may be appropriate to increase the duration of lab periods.

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ENROLLMENT PER SECTION

A common problem is that production techniques must be taught in small classes, which is expensive. Responses to the question on enrollments suggest that on most campuses the low enrollment class is the norm. The results of responses to this question appear in Table 3.

Table 3

Limits on Enrollment

Stds/section	Radio	Television
10-14	13%	26%
15-19	52%	53%
20-25	30%	18%
26-30	04%	01%
Other	01%	02%

While two respondents noted that they handled 40-45 students for lecture and 15-20 students for lab, over half of the respondents noted enrollment limits of 15-19 students. Moreover, in television a large percentage of classes have only 10-14 students enrolled in them.

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TEAM TEACHING

Team teaching is often suggested as a more efficient mode of instruction than that of one faculty for each section of class. On our campus, for example, there is a push for an approach which combines a large lecture by a master teacher with smaller lab sections.

However, in response to the question on the survey, 76% of the respondents report that they incorporated no team teaching methods in their production instruction.

Of those who reported that they did incorporate team teaching, the following were comments: engineering teaches technical; theater teaches lighting; videotapes of faculty teaching their specialty are used; public radio personnel teach some parts; another faculty member teaches scripting.

Several did respond that they were looking into the possibility of team teaching or incorporating instruction using a module system.

Others noted that they had tried team teaching with minimal results, or very mixed results, or that team teaching is very difficult to arrange.

TEXTS

With regard to radio texts, Alten's Audio in Media is the clear favorite with 42% of the respondents using his text. Another 12.5% use Oringel's Audio Control Handbook and an additional 12.5% use no text at all. The remaining

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responses were scattered over 15 titles and various forms of teaching via handouts, Kinko's and in-house texts. Several commented to the effect that no suitable texts are available for the beginnng radio student.

In television courses, Zettl's Television Production Handbook is used by 60% of those who responded. Wurtzel's Television Production is used by 21% of the respondents, and Burrows and Wood's Television Production: Disciplines and Techniques is used by 10% of the respondents. Television texts did not elicit the level of dissatisfaction that the radio texts elicited.

MAJOR PROJECTS

The final item asked for a brief description of the major projects required for the course. The variety of responses was great. A sample appear in the list below.

Major Projects--Radio

Simple mix--e.g. voiceover, seque
30 sec. spots--commercials, PSA's, continuity
Editing exercises
2 min news
5 minutes of programming
Documentaries and features--ranging from 3 min.to 30 min.
Remote broadcasts
Telephone interviews

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On-air shifts at campus radio station--e.g. 20/term

Radio dramas with SFX--5-15 min.

Man-on-the-street interview

30 minute air check from a log

Major Projects--Television

30-60 sec. commercials, PSA's, promos

2-3 min. news, sports block, editorials

4 min. demonstration

5 min. programs--news, any program, mini-doc (studio and remote)

Silent image

Visual essay

Music television

Talk show, interviews

Major project for real client

Pilot for cable television

Competency exams on equipment

Studio drama

Editing

DIRECTIONS

Our response to the problem of student backlog and expense of instruction has been to study the responses to the survey and develop a 2 semester, 10 hour sequence

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(Production I; Production II) which will be offerd for the first time in Fall, 1986. Radio, television, film, and media writing will be covered during both semesters. Each 5 credit course will incorporate 5 hours of lecture and 6 hours of lab weekly.

Some key features of the revision include:

1. Lab time can be used for equipment orientation, writing labs. or additional lecture.
2. Students will produce what they have written, which should encourage more realistic writing projects than are currently written.
3. Basic film principles will be taught using still photography.
4. Advanced audio projects can be completed independently while class and lab instruction in television is occurring.

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